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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on October 1, 2011

YMCA starts operations in Oakwood

Organization has already run swimming pool for years

New Oakwood YMCA

What: Georgia Mountains YMCA branch serving the Oakwood areas

Where: City Park, Railroad Street, with offices at 3828 Main St.

Programs: Fitness center, fitness programs, after-school program offices, swimming (already managed by YMCA in summer)

Fees: Monthly fees and joiner fees vary, from \$22 for ages 62 or older to \$45 for a husband and wife without dependent children

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Ivan Altuzar, left, executive director of the Oakwood YMCA branch, Rich Gallagher, center, president and CEO of the Georgia Mountains YMCA, and Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown talk about Oakwood facilities that will be used by the new Oakwood YMCA branch.

Starting out in community buildings and abandoned old homes, the Georgia Mountains YMCA has planted its foot in Oakwood — and, for the first time, South Hall.

The nonprofit organization, based off Howard Road in Gainesville, has agreed with the city of Oakwood to begin what will start as a three-month partnership, with plans to get fully involved with activities and programs Jan. 1.

As part of an agreement approved by City Council in September, Oakwood plans to pay the YMCA up to \$12,500 over the next three months. The total cost for the parks and recreation program next year will be about \$50,000.

The three-month contract took effect Saturday, with the YMCA already forming big plans using city-owned property in the downtown area.

"For the remainder of the year, we'll look at other things that can be offered," City Manager Stan Brown said. "What we want to do is offer as many programs as possible for the residents."

Much of the new YMCA branch's program will center around City Park off Railroad Street between the Oakwood Police Department and Allen Street.

The YMCA will turn one of two buildings now used for community functions into a fitness center and use the other building for exercise programs, such as yoga and Zumba.

The community building used for programs will remain open for public bookings.

"It's a nicer room (than the other building)," Brown said. "There's a stove in here that's not in the other one. We spent about \$12,000 to \$15,000 on it a couple years ago to redo the flooring, the walls, counters and everything."

Also, one of two houses on Main Street, between McClure Drive and Flat Creek Road, would be used as the Oakwood branch's administrative offices and as main offices for the YMCA's afterschool program.

And the other house could be used as space for future programs.

Rich Gallagher, the YMCA's president and CEO, said the use of community space is not unusual for the organization.

"We have group fitness in Lumpkin County in the same room where they have their (county) commission meetings," he said.

The fitness center should be open in a few weeks, and the popular exercise program Zumba should start this week, said Ivan Altuzar, executive director of the Oakwood branch.

In looking at other programs, the YMCA will consider public input, with officials already having taken notice of their potential clientele.

"There are a lot of moms who come to this park and there is a big group of active senior adults," Altuzar said. "We're going to use these three months to survey people who come to the park and use our services to see what other needs they have."

Teaming up with the YMCA means the fulfillment of a long-time Oakwood goal to expand parks and recreation services, Brown said.

"I think we've got a good model here," he added.

The YMCA has operated the swimming pool for several years already.

The expanded services are "a natural evolution ... and a way for us to make use of current facilities," Brown said. "We create the need and then the need will dictate what the next facility will be."

And while the fitness center, with its rubberized floor, is expected to provide ample space for activities, officials aren't looking for that room, or other current spaces, to become permanent.

The hope is "we grow out of this room and would need a bigger space, and then hopefully move into a storefront or whatever the future may hold," Gallagher said.